



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Seventh Sunday of Easter A



Rembrandt, van Rijn, 1636 *The Ascension*



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer

Prayer to Seek God

Father, in your goodness grant me the intellect to comprehend you,
the perception to discern you,
and the reason to appreciate you.

In your kindness endow me with the diligence to look for you,
the wisdom to discover you,
and the spirit to apprehend you.

In your graciousness bestow on me a heart to contemplate you,
ears to hear you,
eyes to see you,

and a tongue to speak of you.

In your mercy confer on me a conversation pleasing to you,
the patience to wait for you,
and the perseverance to long for you.

Grant me a perfect end - your holy presence.

Amen.

*Saint Benedict of Nursia, 5th c. Monk and Founder
of Benedictines*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
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Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Church gathers in prayer to wait for the coming of the Spirit.
- ▶ It is enjoined upon the Church to continually pray for the Spirit's presence. The disciples gather to pray and wait for the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost.
- ▶ Their prayer is a constant reminder to all disciples throughout the ages to pray unceasingly for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
- ▶ Easter season is an important time for us to reflect on the sacraments of initiation and presence of the Holy Spirit in our sacramental signs. Through the waters of baptism we receive the Holy Spirit and is also true in the sacred chrism of confirmation.
- ▶ During this Easter season we continue to remember and make present the Easter redemption offered to us by Christ through his saving death and resurrection. It takes seven weeks to celebrate, proclaim, and remember the entire paschal event of Easter.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Acts 1: 12-14

- ▶ The disciples gather to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit's arrival at Pentecost.
- ▶ Luke understands the Easter event as three distinct events—Jesus' resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven forty days later and the sending of the Holy Spirit fifty days later at Pentecost.
- ▶ Luke places the disciples in the upper room following Jesus' ascension into glory while they await Pentecost.
- ▶ Rather than succumbing to chaos and disorder, Jesus' disciples gather for prayer under the leadership of the apostles.
- ▶ We catch a glimpse of the emerging church under their leadership.
- ▶ Luke pays particular attention to the role of women in the mission Christ inaugurated. They were the first to spread the Good News. We are thus not to miss who was present at this gathering. Mary, who bore Christ in her womb now gathers with the newly born church as they await the coming of the Spirit.
- ▶ This is the last appearance of Mary in the Scriptures. This was not, however, the end of her mission. She had a continuing, significant role in the developing community as attested to throughout the early tradition.
- ▶ Jesus' relatives were also present as committed disciples even though they were slow to recognize his mission during his earthly life.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ What are the implications for your life in this reading?
- ▶ Put yourself in that upper room. What would you have been feeling? What would you have been discussing?
- ▶ The Christ event was a life-changing event for witnesses. What did the event call them to do with their lives? What does it call you to do in your life?
- ▶ What is the challenge of the Easter and Pentecost event?

Second Reading: 1 Peter 4:13-16

- ▶ Christianity was an illegal religion. Persecution was on the horizon and Peter was preparing for the onslaught that would be coming.
- ▶ Judaism was a legal religion. Christianity operated under the auspices of Judaism. When Christians were expelled from the synagogue they no longer enjoyed the legal status that Jews enjoyed.
- ▶ Christians were thus subject to persecution by the ruling Roman authorities.
- ▶ Christians find true glory when they suffer for the witness of faith in Christ.
- ▶ Christians are reminded that Christ conquered sin and death through the power of the cross.
- ▶ The cross stands as a continuous witness to Christians.
- ▶ There is strength in the cross of Christ. To embrace the cross in one's life is the honor, heritage and destiny of every believer.
- ▶ The faith, life, mission and ministry of each believer will be as strong as that believer's willingness to embrace the paschal mystery in his or her life--that is--their willingness to take up their cross and join their lives to the death and resurrection of Christ.
- ▶ Believers are called to give their lives for the faith they profess.
- ▶ All believers are called to martyrdom.
- ▶ There is no greater sacrifice one can offer than to lay down his or her life for another.
- ▶ There is no greater praise or worship that a believer can offer to God.
- ▶ Christians are invited to participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ—to join our own dying and risings to the cross of Christ.
- ▶ The Church teaches that when we purposefully join our lives to the cross of Christ we are given the privilege to participate in the ongoing redemption of the world. There is no greater honor.
- ▶ Peter lifts up the disciples with the reminder that suffering is cause for rejoicing as it is an opportunity to participate in Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ In what way is this reading a comforting or consoling word?
- ▶ What is the primary theme of this reading and what does it have to do with our everyday lives?
- ▶ Have you ever had the experience of suffering that brought about good in your life or the life of another?
- ▶ Why is suffering so necessary to Christian discipleship?
- ▶ What does it mean to you to offer your own daily dying and risings to the cross of Christ? Will it take away your suffering? What do you hope to accomplish when you do what Peter invites us to do?

Gospel John: 17: 1-11a

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Today's Gospel gives us an awe-filled glimpse of eternal life. Jesus gives us a foretaste of what eternal life means for the believer.
- ▶ Jesus' prayer in today's Final Discourse before his passion echoes the prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy. Jesus engages in holy ritual. He raises his eyes to his Father. He prays a blessing prayer and thanks God for all the blessings of creation much like we do in the Preface of the Mass each and every Sunday.
- ▶ He praises his Father for his salvific work and for promising to send the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Much like every Eucharistic prayer Jesus prays and intercedes to the Triune God on behalf of his people.
- ▶ Jesus gives us a model for prayer--the most perfect form of prayer we can pray.
- ▶ Jesus blesses himself; he consecrates his life for the sacrifice he is about to make. He functions as priest as he obediently offers the true sacrifice of his life—the life he offers to his Father.
- ▶ The "hour" to which Jesus refers is not chronological time. It is called

kairos time. It is *time* that transcends *time*; it is *time* that looks to the past, is present in the *now* and looks hopefully and triumphantly to the *future* that has already arrived.

- ▶ That which the people of God have been praying for since their fall from grace has come to fulfillment in this moment.
- ▶ This is the event that all life has been waiting for--all creation has been groaning in anticipation.
- ▶ God's **Word** is returning to his throne of glory and in so doing opening the gates of salvation for humankind. We can do no less than fall to our knees in humble praise and adoration.
- ▶ Before he takes his leave Jesus gifts us with his life.
- ▶ He returns to his Father's throne and in so doing shows us his Father's face.
- ▶ This is the hour of our vindication. Jesus stands as our Judge before the throne of God and announces us "not guilty".
- ▶ Jesus' sacrifice paid the price of admission to eternal life.
- ▶ When Jesus speaks of *knowing* his Father we are to hear far more than our meager understanding of the word.
- ▶ To know in ancient parlance assumed intimacy and a deep communion with the one who was known.
- ▶ We are able to enter into deep and intimate union with God because we have *known* the Son.
- ▶ We will not be able to fully fathom the level of this intimacy until we join God and the saints as they enjoy eternal communion in heaven.
- ▶ Jesus' enjoyed that communion eternally but throughout his earthly life as well.
- ▶ Jesus is now ready to return to his throne of glory to sit at God's right hand.
- ▶ Jesus' prays that his followers will remain firm in their commitment to build the kingdom and live the Gospel.
- ▶ Jesus will continue to be with them. His presence will be manifest in absence.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See the appendix for an example.

- ▶ What spoke to you the most in today's Gospel?
- ▶ What promises does Jesus make in today's Gospel?
- ▶ What is the Good News in Jesus' words to his disciples?

- ▶ What is the hope he offers?
- ▶ What does Jesus teach us about knowing God? Describe how well you know God?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that we have been vindicated? How will you live your life differently because of that vindication?
- ▶ What does today's reading teach us about the Holy Spirit?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that the Holy Spirit dwells within you?
- ▶ When it comes to building the kingdom of God in your world, what gifts does the Holy Spirit need to strengthen within you?
- ▶ This Gospel gives us a glimpse of the Trinity. What does it reveal to us about the relationship of the Three Persons?
- ▶ What does the Trinity teach us about relationships?

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

- What does it mean to you that we have been vindicated? How will you live your life differently because of that vindication?

Recently we have been reflecting on what it means to be vindicated by God. What exactly does it mean? It means everything. It is the reason for our existence. Jesus paid the price for our lives. It is easy to lose the amazing implications of that statement because we hear it so much, but the implications have eternal implications.

There is a line in a song by Mandisa that says, “Love paid the price for mercy.” Because Jesus chose to stand in for me, I am able to stand before him and be pronounced “not guilty.” There would be no other way to enjoy the Beatific Vision. One thing the period of purification and enlightenment (Lent) does for the believer is cast away allusions and delusions when it comes to the sin in our lives. I cannot change my life on my own. Sin continues to impact my life. I continue to let my ego dominate my decisions even though I promise in earnest that I will stop. As Paul says, “I continue to do the evil I hate...” Why is that? We are born into a sinful human condition. I pray for strength to avoid sin, sometimes I succeed, but all too often I fail. It is in the midst of that failure that I am comforted to know that I have been vindicated and pronounced “not guilty.” When I meditate on that amazing truth I find myself in intimate union with God and I stand in awe. God takes my breath away.

Because of God’s vindication I can only promise to love him with the core of my being. I want to promise to “go and sin no more” but alas I know myself. I will trust that “Love continues to pay the price for mercy” and remember that Jesus pronounces us vindicated from the cross.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Cross and Paschal Mystery
Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and
Purgatory
Salvation/Soteriology
Evangelization
Baptism
Confirmation

Symbols of Bread and Wine
Revelation I or II
Sacraments
Church and Ecclesiology
Church Structure
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY

1 Peter, the second reading today, reminds the people to be steadfast in the midst of suffering and persecution. Believers are to look to the cross as a model of their patient endurance. Peter reminds the community that their glory and honor is the cross of Christ. It is thus fitting that today we focus on the means of our salvation—the cross of Jesus Christ.

ESCHATOLOGY, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY

Jesus, Lord of Life, offers eternal life to his disciples. Jesus prays for his followers before he returns to his Father's right hand. Jesus prays for those he leaves behind. Even though they are no longer of the world, they have to live in it. Jesus goes before them and because he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and accomplishes his mission, the gates of heaven are opened for all believers. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our attention on
ESCHATOLOGY, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

Jesus is about to complete his mission. He prays for his disciples who will be left behind. His ultimate and final act of salvation is about to be inaugurated. It was not until Jesus ascended and returned to his Father's throne at his right hand that the gates of heaven were opened for believers. Thus, this feast is the most appropriate occasion to focus our attention on **SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY**.

EVANGELIZATION

Jesus prays for his disciples as he prepares to leave them. The author of Luke and Acts relate the story of the development of the emerging Christian Church. The Easter season tells the story of the Church. The first reading relates the story of Phillip who, after fleeing persecution in Jerusalem, went to Samaria to preach the Good News and work miracles in Jesus' name. The sacraments of initiation require that we live our baptismal role as priest to serve God's people, prophet to proclaim God's word through our words and actions and king to lead people to Christ. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on our Easter faith and what Jesus commanded us to do--go out and preach the Good News to all the nations. Today's doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

BAPTISM

During the fifty days of Easter, Jesus commissions the Twelve to go out and baptize all nations. We are all called to go out and do the same in Jesus' name. At the Easter Vigil the elect were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgies of the Easter season make the sacraments of initiation an important focus for our doctrinal session. Thus it is fitting that our doctrinal session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM.

SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

The sacrament of confirmation anoints the person with God's Spirit and conforms their life intimately to Christ's life—thus strengthening them to fully participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ that was manifested par excellence at the Easter Vigil. Through this sacrament we are given the strength to profess faith in Christ. During the weeks of Easter we have a front row seat watching the early Church go out and spread the Christian faith when we hear the Acts of the Apostles proclaimed each week. Thus today it is fitting that we focus our attention on the SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION.

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

Every Eucharistic liturgy re-presents the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary and his resurrection from the dead. At the Easter Vigil the elect were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgies of the Easter season are an invitation to focus our attention on the sacraments of initiation. The sacrament of Eucharist fully incorporates the neophyte into the Eucharistic community. When we eat the Bread of Life and drink his Blood we share fully in his Paschal Mystery. The sacraments of initiation incorporate the neophyte into the Paschal Mystery of Christ—his life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Spirit that was manifested par excellence in the Easter Vigil liturgy. Thus today it is fitting that we focus our attention on the sacramental SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE.

REVELATION I or II

Jesus prepares to complete his saving mission. He prays for the disciples he will leave behind. He revealed God to them; now he will send his Spirit to dwell with them until his return. Jesus is the revelation of God—he is the ultimate sacrament of God. Scriptures reveal Christ to us and Christ reveals and is God. It is thus a most appropriate time to focus our attention on REVELATION I or II.

SACRAMENTS

Sacraments continue Christ's saving mission in our day and our time. We are given access to his ministry through the sacraments. The Church teaches that the sacraments of the Church manifest Christ's own Paschal Mystery—his passion, death and resurrection. We remember what Christ did and in the process the Paschal Mystery is made present to us. We are given access to his healing, reconciling and salvific mission through the sacraments. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about sacraments—the celebrations/rituals that bring the healing, reconciling, saving mission of Christ into our midst—that make present Christ's life, passion, death, resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Thus today our doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about SACRAMENTS.

CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY

Throughout the Easter season, Luke, the author of Acts and the Gospel of Luke charts the development of the emerging church—the fledgling communities. The church exists to establish the reign of God now as Christians await the coming of Christ in the age to come. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

Throughout the Easter season, Luke, the author of Acts and the Gospel of Luke charts the development of the emerging church—the fledgling communities. The church exists to establish the reign of God now as Christians await the coming of Christ in the age to come. The church was unified in heart and purpose. They shared all things in common. They upheld the ideal Church as they worked to achieve that end. Ministry was needed in the community and a clear definition of roles. Those roles continue today. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CHURCH STRUCTURE.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.